

Remarks for Andrew Wyllie
Human Rights Council, 9th Session of the Forum on Minority Issues on *Minorities in Humanitarian Crises*
25 November 2016

7 minutes approx.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Excellencies,
Esteemed Colleagues,

I wish to start by thanking the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Isak-Ndiaye for inviting me to speak to you today. On behalf of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), I am very honoured and pleased to join you on this panel.

The Special Rapporteur's report, and the forum discussions yesterday and today, show us that that we still have a long way to go in meeting the specific needs of minorities in humanitarian crises. And there are some valuable recommendations for all of us gathered here on how we should move forward.

Conflict and displacement can affect individuals in different ways depending on factors such as age, gender, and ethnic, linguistic, social, religious and other backgrounds. Crises may exacerbate pre-existing patterns of inequality and discrimination or give rise to new vulnerabilities. Certain groups of persons, such as minorities, as well as certain persons among minorities – including women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons, and lesbian gay bisexual, and transgender persons – may face multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination. They are more often marginalised within communities and less represented in formal decision-making structures. As a result, their specific concerns may be overlooked in needs assessments and in aid programming and delivery.

Failure to acknowledge the particular risks faced by diverse members of the community, not only results in a failure to address these concerns, but it might well lead to actions that inadvertently increase these risks and reinforce discrimination and exclusion. As such, incorporating gender, age and diversity analysis at all stages of the humanitarian programme cycle – from preparedness efforts, throughout the duration of a crisis and beyond – is vital to understanding and addressing the different protection needs and risks within a community.

We must work harder to ensure that humanitarian action in crises does not exacerbate existing discrimination, but rather seeks to address the special needs of minorities and helps to reduce discrimination.

Allow me to highlight a few key areas where there is progress and where we – the humanitarian community – must continue to focus our efforts:

First, humanitarian agencies have in fact already developed policies, tools and approaches to achieve this, through particular methods of data collection, assessment, communication and

monitoring. At the same time, providing relevant, dignified and timely assistance – and ensuring the involvement of affected people in aid programmes - can be a formidable task in the face of multiple challenges humanitarian organisations face including security constraints and gaps in funding.

The Inter Agency Standing Committee, or IASC, which is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance involving key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners, has produced guidance and tools that we must use to the fullest.

In particular the IASC Principals *Statement on the Centrality of Protection* (December 2013) recognises that identifying who is at risk, how and why at the very outset of a crisis is essential. It further calls on humanitarian actors to take into account the specific vulnerabilities that underlie these risks, including those experienced by men, women, girls and boys, and groups such as internally displaced persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, and persons belonging to sexual and other minorities. Doing so is vital to an effective humanitarian response. This approach is also echoed in the *IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action*, which was recently adopted.

Second, we need to engage minorities more often and more deeply in our assessments and monitoring. There are also many guidelines and norms, which reflect the importance of systematic and meaningful engagement, communication and consultation with a broad and representative spectrum of the affected population, including mechanisms for feedback. And there have been some positive practices in the field to operationalize accountability to affected populations commitments that we can build on.

Third, one of the most effective ways to understand the different needs within a population is to collect data that is disaggregated by sex and age, and where possible by other factors such as ethnicity, language and religious affiliation. This is integral to ensuring that assistance is sensitive to the specific needs of minorities and is truly impartial. In practice, however, the data required is often difficult to obtain or even non-existent. The Humanitarian Needs Overview – which is the humanitarian community's collective analysis of the most pressing humanitarian needs in a given country – is a valuable tool to identify and encourage partners to fill important data gaps, including with regard to minorities.

Fourth, including minorities in prevention, preparedness and disaster risk reduction efforts at the operational level is also essential, so that we are compelled to think about their needs, and our response to them, before a crisis occurs. Empowering them with information and skills is an investment in their future and that of their communities.

Fifth and lastly, we need to ensure that minorities are benefiting equally from assistance and receiving the resources they need to build back better after emergencies and to protect them from further marginalisation. We need to support them, not only to deal with the trauma of emergencies and crises, but also to understand their rights and their potential to be powerful agents for change.

This was one of the key themes of the World Humanitarian Summit, wherein leaders from across the humanitarian spectrum gave their resounding support for a new way of working in which humanitarians, development actors and others will not only save lives but work together to reduce vulnerability and build resilience over time.

This forum is an important contribution towards achieving these goals.

Thank you.